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PORTLAND

SPECTATOR

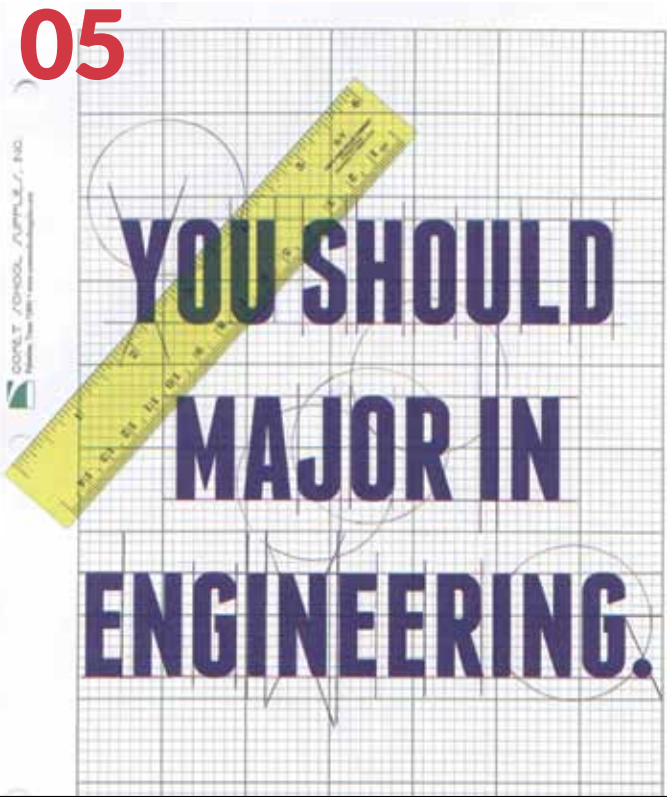

VOLUME 10/ ISSUE 1/ OCTOBER 2011

**YOU SHOULD
MAJOR IN
ENGINEERING.**

STORY ON PAGE FIVE

CONTENTS

The Portland Spectator serves the student body by providing fact-based and well-researched conservative arguments alongside in-depth news coverage of issues important to the student community. We encourage and co-facilitate a diverse marketplace of ideas filled with thought-provoking discussions.

| STORIES | FEATURE | STAFF |
|---|---|--|
| <div><div>04</div><div>PSU Spotlight: Sustainability Sasha Chedygov <i>Portland State pushes forward clean energy through research into electrical vehicles and the cost of solar power.</i></div></div> | <div><div>05</div><div>You Shoud Major in Engineering Sasha Chedygov <i>The nation, and especially the state of Oregon, are short on engineers. Here is what your university is doing about it.</i></div></div> <div></div> | <div><div>Editor-in-Chief Sasha Chedygov</div><div>Art Director Brennan Thome</div><div>Copy Editor Michael Munkvold</div><div>Staff Writers Fatima Jaber</div><div>Contributing Writers Jesse Hansen Monty Herron</div><div>Contributing Designers Melodee Dudley</div><div>Photographers Dan Steiner</div></div> |
| <div><div>08</div><div>GOP no longer anti-gay Michael Munkvold <i>The Oregon Republican Party makes progress towards the acceptance of the LGBT community.</i></div></div> | | |
| <div><div>10</div><div>Problematic parking Monty Herron <i>Portland State changes its parking policies for Blumel residents, but the changes don't appear to be very useful.</i></div></div> | | |
| <div><div>11</div><div>Trick or Treat! Brennan Thome <i>Some things in American culture have managed to stay true to their roots. Halloween is one of them.</i></div></div> | | |
| <div><div>12</div><div>House servants in Lebanon Fatima Jaber <i>Women in Lebanon have the opportunity to make a living as house servants, but some view this as a form of slavery.</i></div></div> | | |
| <div><div>02</div><div>ASPSU Gradebook Jesse Hansen <i>See what your student government is doing for you, and the records we're keeping of them.</i></div></div> | <div><p>The Portland Spectator is published by the Student Publications Board of Portland State University. It is funded through incidental student fees, advertisement revenue, and private donations. All essays and commentaries herein represent the opinions of the writer and not necessarily the opinions of the staff.</p><p>We reserve the right to edit material we find obscene, libelous, inappropriate or lengthy. We are not obliged to print anything to which we do not consent. Unsolicited material will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self addressed envelope. Submission constitutes testimony as to the accuracy.</p><p>Copyright ©2011 The Portland Spectator All rights reserved.</p></div> | <div><p>The Portland Spectator accepts letters to the editor and commentaries from students, faculty and staff at Portland State University. Please limit your letters to 400 words.</p><p>The Portland Spectator: P.O. Box 347, Portland, OR 97207 // SMSU S29 pdxspectator@gmail.com // 503.725.9795 // www.portlandspectator.org</p><div><div><div>twitter</div><div>twitter.com/pdxspectator</div><div>facebook</div><div>www.facebook.com/SpectatorMagazine</div></div></div></div> |

Letter from the Editor

The *Portland Spectator* has had an interesting past. It's had good times and bad. It has been criticized for being too conservative, as well as for not being conservative enough. Its readership has exploded, but also plummeted.

But I want to forget about the past; I want to focus on the future of the magazine. I'm not going to preach to you about how I am going to magically make the *Spectator* a thousand times better—that will be for you to decide. What I am going to tell you is that lots of big changes are in store.

First of all, we are going to expand our presence on the web. In the past, our website and social media outlets have been somewhat neglected and, quite frankly, not very useful. This year, we plan to use our website to post new content to complement the magazine, instead of mirroring it. This means you will get quicker news updates that you wouldn't otherwise get with a monthly publication.

Secondly, as you may have already noticed, we have redesigned the magazine, with a new website in the works. We are going to make the *Spectator* more content-centric, and we think the new look better fits that goal. We want to provide more of the hard content our readers are craving, and strip the magazine of the "fluff" that was scattered throughout our past issues.

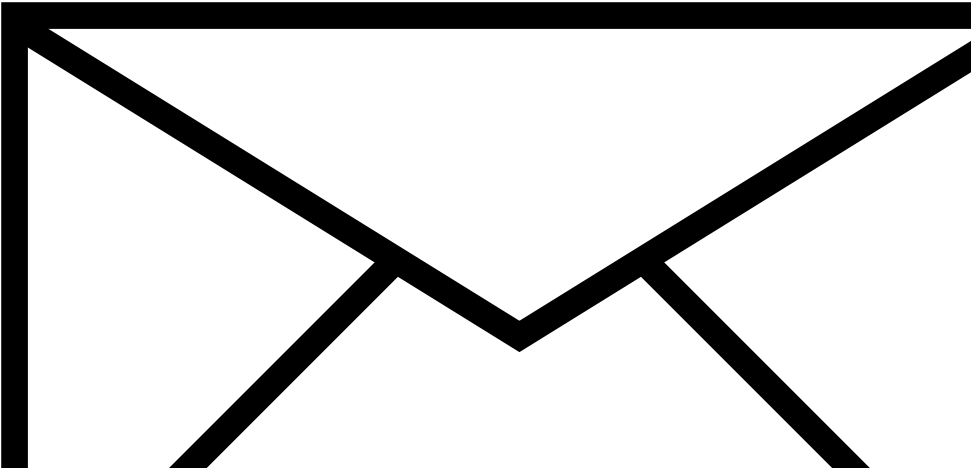
And finally, we are going to be including more conservative-leaning opinion pieces in future issues. Although we still want to draw a fine line between news and opinion, we felt that, somewhere along the line, the *Spectator* lost its conservative feel. We want to keep filling the niche of being a conservative publication on an otherwise liberal campus, while also continuing to provide news and features relevant to all students at Portland State.

This is going to be a year of experimentation. We're going to try new things. Some of the things we try won't work. That's fine; it's a learning experience. But overall, I think the *Spectator* will come out better and more refined than it ever was before.

As always, your feedback and suggestions are infinitely valuable to us. After all, we are writing for *you*. Feel free to email us, write on our Facebook wall, or tweet us any comments you have.

Thank you for reading the *Portland Spectator*. I look forward to a great year.

Sasha Chedygov
Editor-in-Chief



ASPSU Grade Book

EACH MONTH, THE SPECTATOR WILL HIGHLIGHT AND GRADE ASPSU’S ACTIONS, CULMINATING IN A FINAL GRADE AT THE END OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR. AFTER ALL, WE ARE IN AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING, AND THERE ISN’T A PASS/NO PASS OPTION FOR ASPSU.

Highlight of 2010-2011

Student union reprioritization plan and SMSU 2020 Committee

Lowlights of 2010-2011

Lack of information about restructuring
Food pantry lock issues
Recess
Tailgating
Outdated w website

2010-2011 Final Grade: B- 2.5 GPA

How will ASPSU fare in 2011-2012?

Jesse Hansen

With the 2011-2012 school year now upon us, students campus wide are settling back into classes and hitting the books once again. As Portland State’s student government officials return to their offices, another exciting year is on the horizon for Portland State student politics. With key issues looming on the immediate horizon (restructuring, and the sad state of higher-Ed funding to name a few) we’ll keep a close eye on student government, so you don’t have to.

Having recently won a rocky election plagued by constant allegations of infraction, President Adam Rahmlow and his staff have finally settled into their positions after a summer of high-intensity preparation. ASPSU has already made notable changes in policy and practice that appear to be smoothing out the operation of the institution. With last year’s senate and executive staff facing constant infighting and a revolving door turnover, this year’s staff is already aiming to far surpass the effectiveness of last year’s cabinet. Now, as PSU students campus wide settle into their classes, Rahmlow and his team prepare to tackle the diverse and varied issues facing Portland State and the Oregon University System.

Staff Retention: A-

Suffering from a crippling turnover during the 2010-2011 academic year, ASPSU is proud to announce that they have only experienced a handful of resignations from the senate, with no executive positions being vacated. Having lost last year’s Vice-President before the first day of fall term, as well as her replacement several months later, the ASPSU office is already poised to maintain its strong executive staff, a vital improvement over last year. “It’s perfectly normal to lose a few senators right as school starts”, said ASPSU President Adam Rahmlow. “Sometimes they lose interest over the summer or just decide they don’t want the extra responsibility.” Also, in an effort to maximize the effectiveness of staff members, Vice President Whitehead and ASPSU officials have created a 110 page manual for incoming staff members. Though all members have received formal training before entering their respective positions in the past, Whitehead claims that the manual provides an expanded wealth of resources that will enable new employees to quickly familiarize themselves with the bureaucracy at PSU.

Student Outreach: B-

As far back as institutional memory can recall, ASPSU has been hounded by one ever-present issue: lack of student interest. When asked what ASPSU does, or even what it is, your average PSU student will respond with nothing short of head scratching and a blank stare; this year’s cabinet hopes to challenge that student apathy and foster a greater interest in the institution. President Rahmlow, who organized last year’s wildly successful roof top party, aims to make good on his campaign promise of increased school sponsored events to build a campus wide community.

Another issue ASPSU has addressed from last year is the lack of interaction with student groups. Recently, a dedicated position was established in ASPSU’s executive staff to maintain relations with student groups, and help create a clear communication pathway between ASPSU and other student run organizations. Though ASPSU presence on campus has been relatively minimal for the opening week of school, it’s clear they intend to focus on student outreach with a renewed vigor.

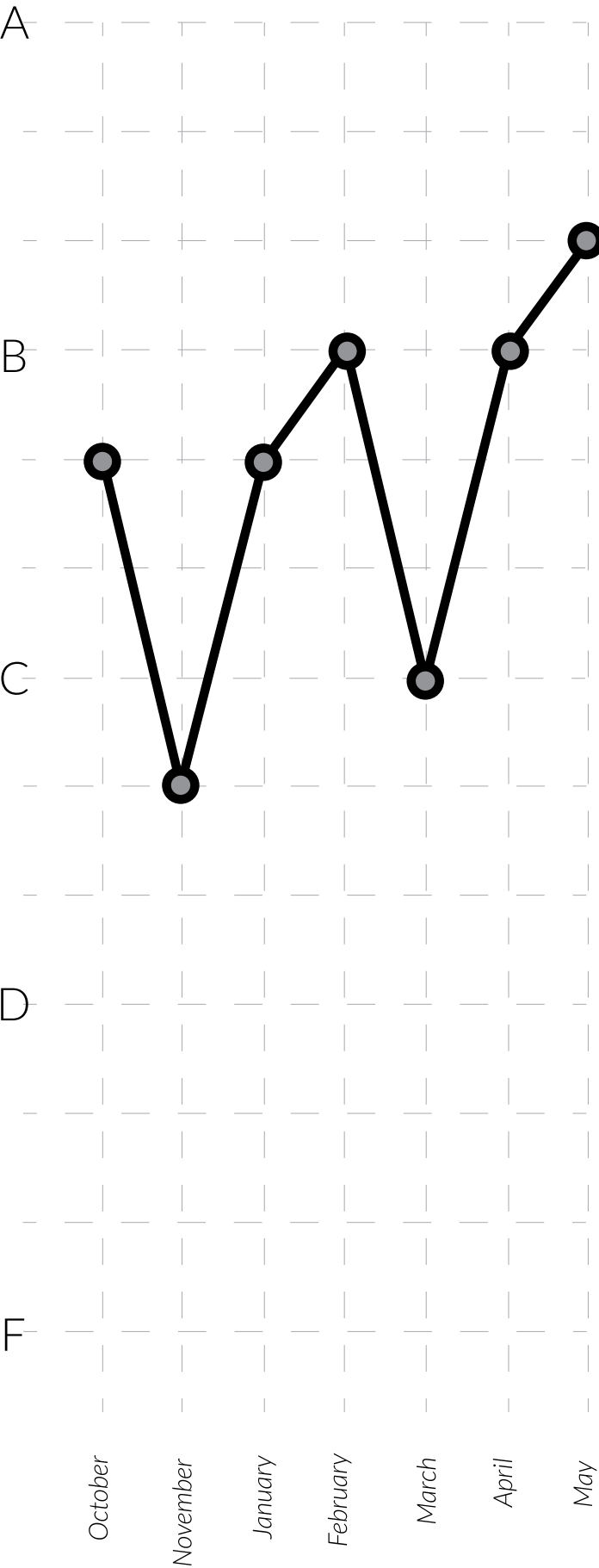
Campaign Promises: A

It should come as no surprise that politicians, whether at the student level, or the national level, will say anything to get elected. During spring term, Rahmlow and Whitehead promised to dedicate their energy to student rights and dignity issues, and fight for a greater student voice on the Portland State campus. Though it’s still too early to say whether Rahmlow will follow through, ASPSU has fought hard to place students in positions of power on committees dedicated to hiring PSU staff and faculty members. Already, claimed ASPSU president, students have sat on committees directly responsible for the hiring of “several high profile faculty members. Director of operation, and former communications directo, Brandon Harri, added that during summer term alone, ASPSU has accomplished more of their short term goals than last year’s cabinet did all year. “We’re off to an amazing start,” he claimed.

Overall: A-

This year, it’s clear that ASPSU is hard at work right out of the gate. The atmosphere is noticeably more professional when contrasted against last year’s cliquish and generally self-interested office. Thus far, Rahmlow and his team have the organization running like a well-oiled machine. The presidential desk has been returned to the main floor, replacing the private office enjoyed by last year’s president, Katie Markey, with a board room. Executive staff members diligently field phone calls, and questions from students, and the heinously un-navigable ASPSU website has been replaced by a sleek, svelte, and user friendly interface thanks to Publications Director Donovan Powell. Though it’s still too early to predict the ultimate outcome, the organization is aiming to not only clean up its act this year, but also make lasting beneficial institutional changes for future ASPSU cabinets.

2010-2011 Final Grade Book Outcome



PSU Spotlight: Sustainability’s still kickin’

PORTLAND STATE PUSHES FORWARD CLEAN ENERGY THROUGH RESEARCH INTO ELECTRICAL VEHICLES AND THE COST OF SOLAR POWER.



Sasha Chedygov

If you thought Portland State University just couldn’t get any more “green,” you were wrong. While you were enjoying your summer (or taking summer courses), PSU was hard at work pushing clean energy forward, with two especially notable projects.

The first of these is Electric Avenue. Unveiled on August 11 in partnership with Portland General Electric and the city of Portland, Electric Avenue is a two-year research project aimed at encouraging the development and use of fully electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles. Located on SW Montgomery between Broadway and 6th, it contains eight parking spaces and several charging stations, two of which are for electric bikes and motorcycles. The stations are powered entirely by renewable energy, provided by PGE, and are completely free to use. (Parking rates still apply.)

Though electric vehicles are currently far from the norm, the future looks bright for them—it is estimated that by 2020, electric vehicles will clock a total of 250 billion miles each year in the United States. Electric Avenue’s primary goal is to study electric transportation and provide research into how electric vehicles affect the city and the environment, so the city of Portland can be ready for a future of sustainable transportation.

The second of these projects is a state-wide program designed to reduce the cost of solar energy. Dubbed “Solar by Degrees,” the program, launched on August 18 by the Oregon University System and led by Governor Kitzhaber, is the nation’s largest university-led solar project.

“It lets students be able to study the impact of solar vs. more traditional and unclean energy on campus,” said Diane Saunders, Director of Communications at OUS. The program is funded by

private clean energy company Redco, which opens up a lot of internship opportunities. “We’re taking these things that students are studying in class and putting them out there,” she said.

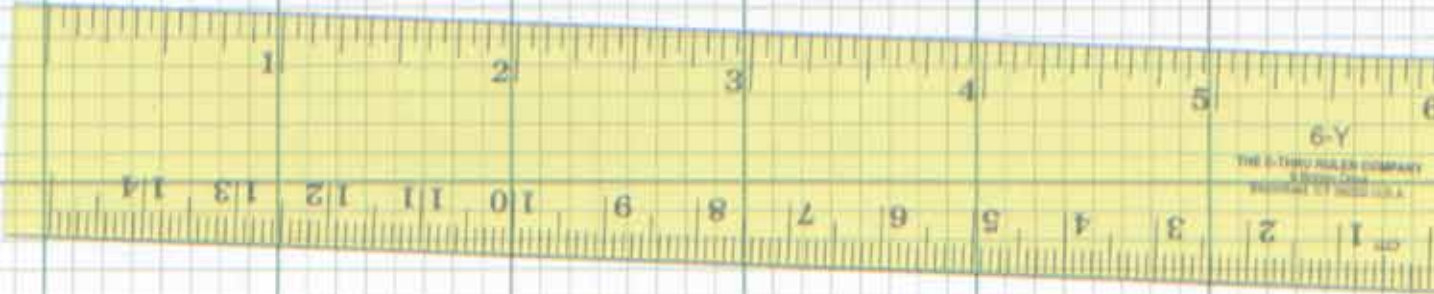
On top of the benefit this provides to students, the project also dramatically decreases energy costs for Oregon’s universities, and costs the OUS nothing to implement. “It’s a great public-private partnership that has no cost to the University System or its students,” said Saunders.

Solar by Degrees is currently being led by Oregon State University, Oregon Institute of Technology, and Eastern Oregon University, with PSU and the other public Oregon universities joining the program during Phase II next year.

YOU SHOULD MAJOR IN ENGINEERING

Sasha Chedygov

THE NATION, AND ESPECIALLY THE STATE OF OREGON,
ARE SHORT ON ENGINEERS. HERE IS WHAT YOUR
UNIVERSITY IS DOING ABOUT IT.





On August 31, Intel President and CEO Paul Otellini and U.S. Secretary of Energy Steven Chu lead a panel discussion at Portland State University about the engineering shortage currently facing the nation.

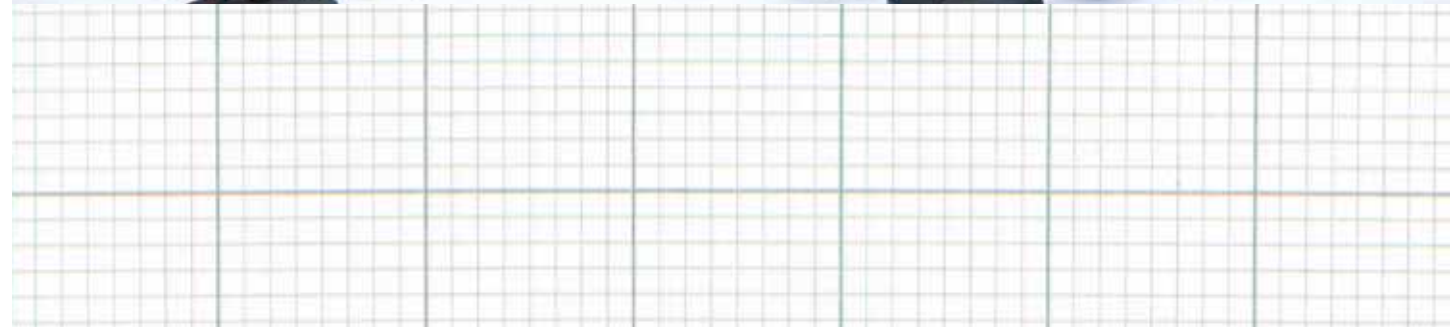
Over the past 20 years, we have seen an increase of about 50 percent in the number of college graduates per year, but the number of engineering degrees remains more or less unchanged, at around 120,000 per year. On the other hand, the number of engineering graduates in India and China has increased to over 1 million a year. To keep the United States competitive in the tech market, Otellini and Chu say that this needs to change quickly.

“We are still number one in innovation... There are other difficulties,” explained Chu. One of these difficulties is keeping students from leaving the engineering program. The retention rate for engineering programs nationwide is an appalling 40 percent, which means that three out of every five engineering students do not finish their degrees. “We need to keep initially motivated students motivated,” said Chu.

Many of the panelists agreed that one of the reasons for the low retention rate of engineering students is lack of preparation for the program. Since engineering is such a fast-paced field of study, it becomes very easy for students to fall behind, which can be very hard to recover from. “Once you fall behind, you feel like you can’t catch up,” said Chu.

On top of this, there is also the issue of perception. “There is a general misconception that the engineering jobs in this country are outsourced. That cannot be further from the truth,” said Otellini. He explained that there are actually plenty of available jobs in the field of engineering, but fewer and fewer graduates with whom to fill them; this is partly because of the perception that engineers will soon become irrelevant in the United States.

“We need more engineers out of schools and into the workspace,” said Otellini. However, in order for students to finish their engineering degrees, they need to feel like they can find a job after graduating. “The perception piece is large,” said Purdue University engineering dean Leah Jamieson.

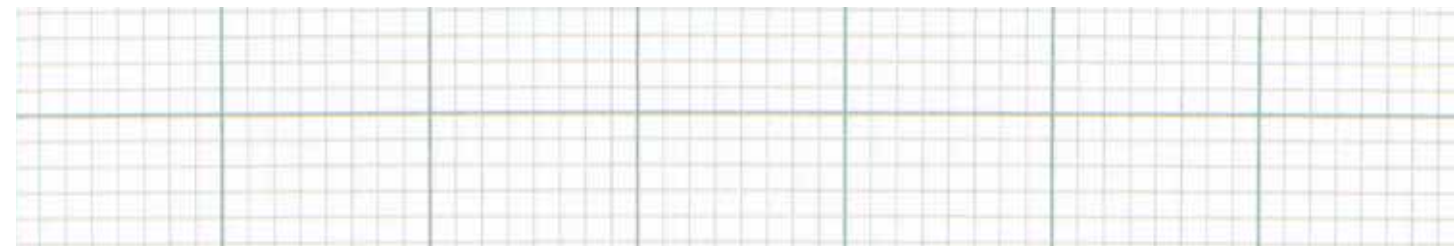


This is an especially large issue for Oregon, which plays host to Intel and other large engineering-related businesses. The percentage of Intel employees who graduated from Oregon universities is only 14 percent, and only 2.5 percent for those with Ph.D.’s.

One of the ways in which Intel and other businesses throughout the nation are planning on getting more engineering students into the real world is through a dramatic increase in internship opportunities. 45 businesses—among them Intel, Facebook and General Electric—pledged to double the amount of internships they provide in 2012, opening up approximately 6,300 new internship opportunities.

Despite these issues, Portland State seems to be doing very well in regards to its engineering program, and has ambitious goals for expanding it. “We want to try to increase enrollment by 20% over the next 5 years,” said Renjeng Su, dean of engineering at PSU, told the *Spectator*. At around 2,300 engineering students currently enrolled, that’s a target increase of almost 500 students—a hefty figure, but Su believes it is realistic.

Over 1,000 PSU graduates have worked at Intel since getting their degrees—more than any other Oregon university. Su says that PSU needs to take advantage of its proximity to Oregon businesses to provide a better learning experience for its students. “We are in a place surrounded by industrial companies,” he said.



Being in an urban environment provides PSU with the unique opportunity of being able to partner with private businesses to provide students with real-world experience through internships and post-university job opportunities. “We need to up our reputation,” said Su, citing “career draw” as the best way to do that.

Ideally, Su says he would like to find more niche areas of study within engineering. “Not all students have the same interests and strengths,” said Su. “Take software as an example. Software is used in medical equipment, and also in manufacturing. It’s used in different ways, but we only have one computer science program.” Allowing students to become more specialized within their major would make the university much more attractive, and would better prepare students for their careers in the future.

However, there are internal issues that need to be taken care of first. An initial barrier to entry for the engineering program at PSU, and a large factor in the attrition rate, is student advising. Su says PSU advising needs to strengthen its connection with engineering students and provide more direct help to students ahead of time, to make sure that they do not fall behind. “We need to remove the barriers, remove the confusions,” he said.

Oregon GOP removes anti-gay language from party platform

THE OREGON REPUBLICAN PARTY MAKES PROGRESS TOWARDS THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE LGBT COMMUNITY. BUT WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE FUTURE OF THE PARTY?

Michael Munkvold

On September 10, the Oregon Republican Party reached a major milestone in its troubled history concerning Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) rights when it removed from its 2012 platform language denouncing same-sex domestic partnerships and gay adoption. The policy change and the end result of a weekend convention in Bend signaled a dramatic shift toward acceptance of the LGBT community in a party that, fairly or not, is often seen as homophobic. While this policy change was hard-won, passing by a slim majority after initially being rejected, many Republicans in Oregon say it marks a new beginning in the GOP's relationship with LGBT voters, and creates a chance for the party to improve its electoral fortunes in a solidly Democratic state.

"In a state like Oregon, it makes no sense to exclude people on the basis of sexual orientation," says Brendan Monaghan, a delegate with Multnomah County Republicans who brought the proposal to a final vote. "That's not how you build a party or attract new, younger voters. We want to take the focus away from these divisive issues that don't create jobs or help the economy."

The original language in the platform concerning family issues read, "We do not consider 'same-sex marriage' to be 'marriage' nor 'civil unions' to have any equivalency nor right to legal standing. Nor do we believe 'same-sex marriage' or 'civil unions' worthy of legal standing for adoption or parenting purposes." This passage has been modified to remove objections to civil unions and gay adoption, even as it retains the position that marriage should be between a man and a woman.

For Xander Almeida, the former president of Portland State University's College Republicans who served as an alternate delegate for Multnomah County Republi-

cans, this language was unacceptable in a party that so often makes an issue of state sovereignty and individual freedom.

"We felt the anti-gay language was against state law, in that it stood against the rights that gays and lesbians in this state already have," says Almeida, a former staff writer for The Portland Spectator. "We agree with the majority of Oregonians that domestic partnerships are completely acceptable, so we felt that the original language in the platform was unnecessarily antagonistic."

Once dominant in Oregon politics, the state's Republican Party has suffered a major reversal of fortune in recent years; Democrats dominate the state legislature, and no Republican has occupied the Governor's Mansion since 1987.

A significant factor in the Oregon Republican Party's fall out of voters' favor was its association with the Oregon Citizens Alliance (OCA), a conservative Christian political organization that attracted national attention in 1992 with Ballot Measure 9; a controversial piece of legislation that would have forbidden schools from portraying homosexuality in a positive light, and that put homosexuality in the same context as pedophilia and sadism. The measure was soundly defeated, and the majority of Oregon voters were turned off by Republicans' embrace—or, at least, unspoken approval—of the group.

The change in platform is in part an effort to improve the party's image regarding gay rights as a way to attract more voters, particularly young people who favor gay rights and are leery of social conservatives, especially the so-called Religious Right. Almeida explains that the party seeks to move its focus away from social issues in favor of economic policy and is trying to do more to welcome voters in the LGBT com-

munity, many of whom he says share its belief in smaller government and fiscal conservatism.

"Gay voters who are business owners or who are looking for a job would be better served by Republican policies," he said. "I know a lot of gay people who agree with our economic policies, and now they no longer have to see our ideology on LGBT issues as a stumbling block."

Jeff Raymond, Chairman of Multnomah County Republicans, said that the change in language serves as an invitation to Oregon's LGBT community to examine the party's stance on economic issues without feeling threatened by its reputation concerning gay rights. He stated that he and many other Oregon Republicans would feel "perfectly fine" about running an openly gay candidate and that the party has a solid working relationship with Log Cabin Republicans who have heralded the change in language as a step toward greater inclusiveness within the party, both in Oregon and nationwide.

"We have no litmus test," said Raymond. "We welcome anyone who believes in small government and fiscal responsibility. Anything we can do to show that we don't exclude anyone is a good thing."

The vote for the change in language did not come easy; however, the motion to alter the platform was at first shot down 2-1 by a caucus of party members focusing on the section concerning marriage and family issues. The move for policy change was considered dead in the water

until Almeida contacted Oregon Republican Party Chairman Allen Alley, who recommended that it be put to a full floor vote.

Raymond stated that a big part of the conflict, stemmed from socially conservative delegates' fear that changing stance on family-related issues would weaken the party's official position on marriage. He also addressed that the conflict most likely arose from a basic misunderstanding of social conservatives' motives for opposing the change.

"Some delegates were insulted by the implication that they were anti-gay in the first place," said Raymond. "The message may have been a bit jumbled there. They said, 'We're not against gay people, we just want to be clear about our feelings on marriage.'"

Almeida says that he understands critics' concerns, but thinks that they are largely unfounded in a state in which slightly more than 50 percent of voters oppose gay marriage.

"There were some people who were afraid this change would open the gates to gay marriage, but they have no cause to be afraid unless the majority of Oregon voters change their minds," said Almeida.

The policy change may have its critics, but they appear to be outnumbered by people across the political spectrum praising the party's new attitude, including gay rights organizations such as Basic Rights Oregon. Almeida stated that he has been personally thanked by many Republicans

who like him, have gay friends and relatives and do not believe that a person's sexual orientation is a choice; he is especially proud of the note he received from a Multnomah County Republican thanking him for accepting his bisexual daughter. "That was really powerful for me," said Raymond.

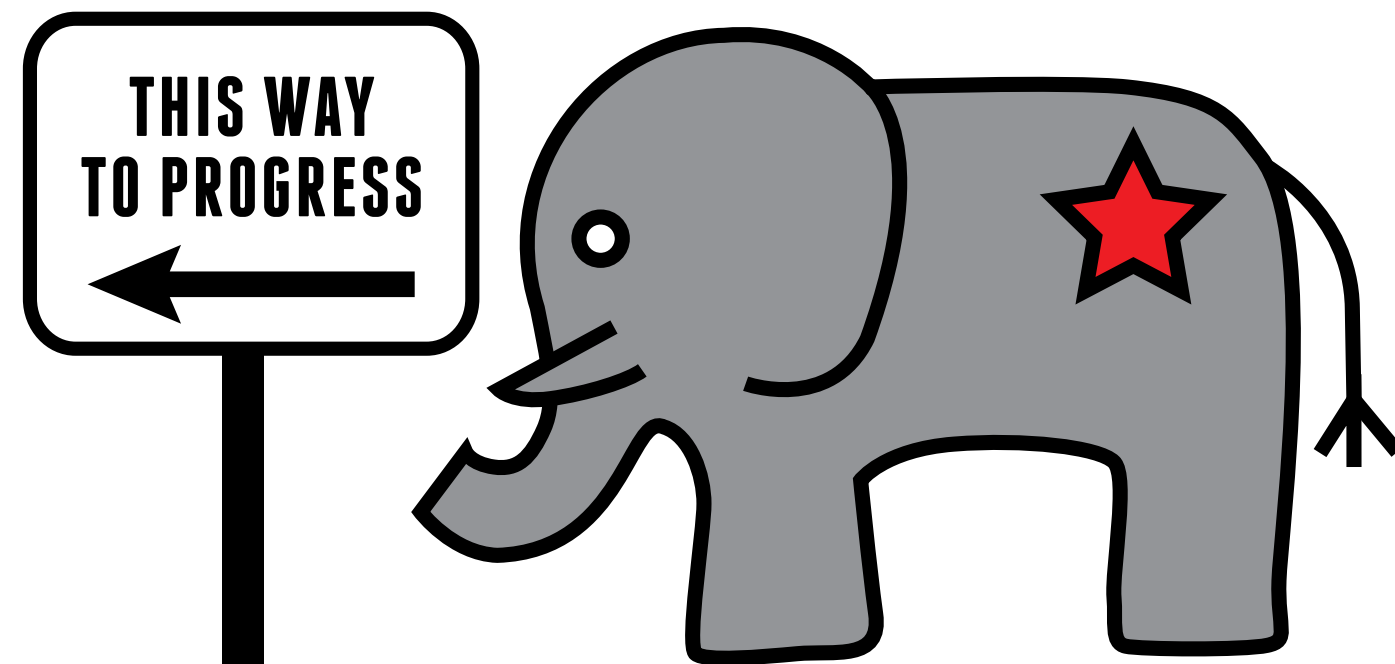
"Anyone in a legally binding relationship deserves the rights afforded them by law, including partnership and adoption," said Raymond. "To be against people who were born a certain way is kind of like being against women or black people."

Raymond explains that the party has taken steps to move toward the center on LGBT issues, it seeks to renew its focus on job creation and economic policy and that people of all sexual orientations are welcome to help.

"There are far bigger issues to focus on," said Raymond. "Gay or straight, we all agree that the economy is in dire straits, and we want to appeal to anyone who recognizes the need to fix this mess."

Almeida echoes that sentiment, and says that the state GOP's new, accepting tone concerning gay rights will persuade the LGBT community that it has an ally in the Oregon Republican Party.

"We made a powerful impact," said Raymond. "We made it clear that the Republican Party welcomes fiscal conservatives who happen to be gay. They are out there."



Problematic campus parking

PORTLAND STATE CHANGES ITS PARKING POLICIES FOR BLUMEL RESIDENTS, BUT THE CHANGES DON'T APPEAR TO BE VERY USEFUL.



Monty Herron

“I applaud Transportation & Parking Services’ attempts to maximize the space we have available... but it could have been done differently”

Surprises are a lot of fun, usually... except when I went to renew/purchase my parking permit for Fall term and found that I can’t.

I’m a resident of Blumel Hall. I pay a little over \$900 a month for that privilege in addition to paying around \$318 per term for my permit. I consider myself a ‘stakeholder’ in what happens there, so imagine my surprise at being told there was a major change in how permits are administered in Blumel now. Blumel residents will only be allowed to park on the lower level of the garage; the upper level is being turned into a pay-to-park area, with a single sandwich board to advertise this.

I communicated with Sarah Renkens, Manager of PSU Transportation & Parking Services, who addressed that in the past, they have opened up parking permits to non-residents if there were permits available after the beginning of the term. In years past, there always were; however, since the change, I can state that the entire lower deck is full—mission accomplished.

“We have a high demand for hourly and daily permit sales on campus,” Renkens said. “Since the demand for Blumel Hall permits is low, we decided to try offering daily and hourly sales on the upper level, so we can maximize the use of parking on campus.”

As a current resident, I’d like to point out the following statements that may have been missed:

First, stakeholders should have been consulted on this in the same way as with other issues. When dining wants to make changes, they do surveys. I have asked a number of students, both residents and non-resident stakeholders, if they were ever asked about these changes; they replied that they were not alerted to these changes by way of survey or otherwise.

Secondly, there is an outside access on the upper deck of Blumel, with two 30-minute loading zones nearby for an entire housing unit, yet the lower level of Blumel’s garage has no inside access to the building, which leaves individuals having to walk out and around to the front doors for access. This raises the question: how does this benefit the residents?

“Like any new parking area, it will likely take a little while to get the lot advertised and get people used to parking there, but since it is quite visible and will be easy to find for visitors once we have signs installed, we think it will be a good place for short-term parking,” Renkens said. “Permit holders are generally students who are very familiar with campus and will be able to easily find the lower level of the garage.”

Renkens is correct in stating that there is much higher visibility on the upper deck, as there are quite a few apartment windows looking out. This visibility allows residents to feel much more confident that their vehicles are safe. Residents must already contend with vandalism and other safety concerns, and with combined parking and housing fees of over \$3,000 per term, I think it is reasonable for a resident to want that higher visibility for their vehicle, and convenient egress to and from the building.

The pay station and additional signage could have just as easily been placed on Blumel Hall’s lower garage level; the pay station was installed in a single day, and could easily be moved to the lower level. I applaud Transportation & Parking Services’ attempts to maximize the space we have available, since it is clear that a change was in order, but it could have been done differently.

Renkens would appreciate student feedback, though she added that nothing has yet been finalized. If Transportation & Parking Services receive enough feedback supporting changes in how its parking is run, such changes can be made. Make your voice heard, and encourage them to include the concerns of all student stakeholders, resident and non-resident, in the future.

To give feedback of any kind, please contact Sarah Renkens, Manager, Transportation & Parking Services, Portland State University. Phone: 503.725.4412

Once , twice, three times a pagan holiday

HOLD ON: AMERICANS HAVEN’T “AMERICANIZED” EVERYTHING EVER. SOME THINGS IN AMERICAN CULTURE HAVE MANAGED TO STAY TRUE TO THEIR ROOTS.

Brennan Thome

Americans have very little problem adapting things to fit their daily routine. Some cynics would go as far to call it bastardization, but sometimes, traditions become antiquated. It’s only a matter of time before they are adapted to fit our vision of the modern world. Do you know how the Americano got its name? The European espresso was too strong for those fighting overseas during the Second World War, so water was added. Many other things have been Americanized (read: modernized) but it doesn’t detract from the original essence and origin of the thing. It doesn’t make that thing less legitimate. Holidays especially have run the gamut. Christmas is harangued from both ends, straddling the blurry line between the “consumer holiday” and “keep the ‘Christ’ in ‘Christmas’” sentiments.

Now, Halloween. That’s got to be one of those overtly Americanized holidays, what with all those greedy kids running around town collecting as much candy as humanly possible. Americans are greedy, thus, Halloween must have been aptly created. As much as we all want to believe this, it’s not really true.

For the most part, Halloween has stayed true to its origins. It will benefit everyone to know that Halloween has not been adapted in any extensive way, shape or form to better exemplify American culture.

Halloween began as a pagan Celtic harvest festival called Samhain, which celebrated the transition from summer to winter, a common metaphor for life to death. Samhain was also influenced



by a Roman holiday celebrating the dead called Parentalia. Christianity, of course, forcibly made its influence on the holiday. Christians attempted to make the holiday a bit less pagan, since they didn’t approve of the way the Celts lived. Their take on Samhain was All Saints Day, in honor of dead saints and martyrs. Christians intended their holiday to replace Samhain, but that inevitably failed. Surprise, surprise.

It wasn’t until the 1800s that Halloween turned into what it is now, and that’s thanks to the Irish and English immigrants. They introduced the version of Halloween Americans know best.

“Guising” (costuming) was popular in turn-of-the-century Scotland and Ireland, and became popular here in the beginning of the 20th century.

The first mass-produced costumes hit stores in the 1930s. The first variant of trick-or-treating was called “souling.” The poor went door-to-door and begged for food and coins in return for their souls. Trick-or-treating is no longer done out of necessity, but for want of a sugar overload. Jack-o’-lanterns were originally carved out of turnips, but pumpkins soon took over as they were more readily available and easier to carve.

Some people are still wary of Halloween, thinking it leads people to a neo-pagan lifestyle. Those people are the same ones who support the ban of Harry Potter books in schools. It’s seemingly difficult for them to understand that there are viable alternatives to the Christian lifestyle. Yes, it’s true that Halloween started out as a pagan ritual, but it’s doubtful your kids want to do anything more than stuff their faces full of candy.

It’s not a bad thing for traditions to be adapted to better fit our modern lifestyle. It’s hard to find a turnip large enough in which to carve The Incredible Hulk’s face. It’s also not appropriate to offer your soul in exchange for a Baby Ruth. (Everyone knows Skittles are the only immortal candy.) It is important, though, to be aware of the origins of things so you can trace the metamorphoses. Traditions are only passed down when they can be adapted to fit modern times. Antiquities will inevitably die out. Flexibility and willingness to adapt will always prevail.

Migrant Domestic Workers program helps women in poverty

IMPOVERISHED WOMEN IN LEBANON HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A MEAGER LIVING AS HOUSE SERVANTS, BUT SOME VIEW THIS AS A MODERN FORM OF SLAVERY.

Fatima Jaber

The program of Migrant Domestic Workers was established in January 2006 under the leadership of the Ministry of Labor. The extreme levels of poverty common in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and the Philippines forced women to migrate to Lebanon in search of jobs as house servants.

“She was curled up in the fetal position, crying. I asked her what was wrong and she said, ‘Mama, Baba... telephone.’ She broke my heart and I gave her the phone to call her family back home in Bangladesh,” said Dalal Hazimeh, an owner of a migrant domestic worker.

“This is a good idea for those who don’t have jobs and want to make money,” said Ali Alamin, the president of the Migrant Domestic Workers program.

This system benefits both the foreign workers and the households to which they are traveling. Half of all Lebanese households are desperate to have a servant in the house since they will be there to help with cooking, cleaning, and to act as a nanny for the children. Another 20 percent of Lebanese households hire these workers not based on need but because they can afford to do so and feel entitled to have others do work around the house. This new type of employment for migrants has two opposing perspectives: as an opportunity for impoverished women to provide for themselves and their families, and as a modern form of slavery.

Once an individual decides this is something they want to pursue, their application is sent with their picture to the Lebanese embassy where Alamin and other com-

mittee members decide whether or not this woman is a suitable candidate.

“There is a three-month trial once they arrive at the family’s house. They have the option of being released or exchanged if the sponsoring family is not satisfied or if the servant is not satisfied,” said Alamin.

A written contract must also be read and signed before they enter a household. The terms of the contract are in part dictated by the worker’s home country and some require a minimum of either a two- to three-year long stay.

Age is one of the largest deciding factors in awarding contracts. The migrant’s home country specifies an

age range, which can vary greatly.

In Bangladesh, for example, the servant must be over 25 and Sri Lankan workers must be over 21.

For Ethiopia and

the other remaining countries, the applicants must be 18 and over; however, some look much younger than they announce.

“They change their age on their passports. A girl once came into my office that looked like she was 15 years old. What was I supposed to do? Tell her she can’t work?” said Alamin.

Currently, the majority of Lebanese migrant workers come from Ethiopia. Most of them leave their homes and families behind in order to travel abroad and make money to send back home even though there is no guarantee that it will reach their loved ones.

“Almost all of them feel very homesick when they arrive. They are not used to the food or culture and have



to struggle to learn Arabic by body language in order to have conversation with the sponsors,” said Alamin.

Their monthly wages reflect the amount of previous housekeeping experience the servants have. The minimum is usually \$100 per month, which is considered a decent amount in their home countries. The sponsors pay for their plane tickets—a minimum of \$2,000 per servant — along with a return ticket. The advantage is full accommodation by the host families that covers all food, clothing and a free room.

There are those in Lebanon who debate over this new type of employment and some even state that this can also be seen as a form of indentured servitude.

One of the stipulations in the contract is that servants are not allowed to leave the house without asking for permission from the sponsors. This is one of the reasons the concern of slavery has been voiced.

“I don’t consider this to be slavery at all; taking somebody out of their country by force is considered slavery. Families here in Lebanon are supporting them so of course this is definitely not slavery,” said Alamin.

However, verbal abuse directed towards the servants is common, and sometimes physical abuse occurs as well, which often leads to the servants running away.

“There are millions of reasons why some families abuse their servants; some sponsors are raised this way and perform these acts on the servants without noticing,” said Alamin.

The servants who are verbally or physically abused are now coming up with different ways of taking revenge. Some steal money from their sponsors, some kill host family members, and some, as they are unable to handle such harsh treatment, even kill themselves.

Some servants, cut off from contact with friends and family and under intense pressures from their sponsors, feel very lonely and encourage any type of sexual encounter which frequently leads to instances of sexual abuse or rape.

In cases where the worker becomes pregnant they have very few options. Cultural pressures on the host family force the servants to be deported. Servants avoid this is by secretly having an abortion, or through suicide. These acts carry consequences for the Lebanese hosts as well; if the servant does end up getting pregnant and the host family finds out, it may also affect the sponsors, as rumors can develop about them.

Even with the controversy of abuse and high occurrence of suicide, the fact still remains that this new trend in Lebanese society benefits the workers in spite of the hardships they face.



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